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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: DIYANET PURSUING AGENDA OF REFORM, EDUCATION, AND
OUTREACH

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary. The reform agenda of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) Foundation complements GOT efforts to modernize Turkish society, Mehmet Gormez, Diyanet's Vice Chair for Foreign Relations and Publications, told us during a September 13 meeting. The Diyanet, according to Gormez, is actively engaged in improving human rights, increasing education domestically and abroad, and is helping to combat prejudice against Muslims. Although Gormez may have overstated the impact of the reforms, he clearly understands that government support for such cultural change may soften suspicions among ultra secularists and religious minorities regarding the Diyanet's basically Sunni Muslim agenda. End summary.

DIYANET DECENTRALIZES CONTROL OVER SERMONS, MOSQUES

¶2. (C) In a meeting September 13 meeting, Gormez told us that, since he took office in 2003, the Diyanet has been pursuing a reform agenda to help modernize Turkish society. He noted the government's recent decision to recognize Turkey's regional and cultural differences by devolving central responsibility for writing and monitoring Friday sermons. Permitting each province to incorporate local concerns in the weekly religious message demonstrates the government's concerns for human rights, according to Gormez. "East and west might not see things the same way," Gormez noted. As an example, he said the Black Sea coastal provinces might not respond to a sermon on environmental protection in the same way as areas in the country's southeast.

PROGRESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS OVERSHADOWED BY NEGATIVE PRESS

¶3. (C) The Diyanet's full support of human rights reform is also demonstrated by its efforts to hire more women, Gormez told us. Out of a total of 80,000 Diyanet employees, Gormez said, the number of female employees has increased to 5,000 from 1,500 since he took over three years ago. The Diyanet also currently has nine women appointed as deputy muftis. Gormez further claimed the Diyanet was active in fighting "honor killings" under his tenure. These incidents had been declining during the last 20-30 years, according to Gormez, but he said the media coverage made this seem otherwise. Showing mixed feelings about the press, Gormez said that although "it is a good thing" that "press coverage of many human rights issues has increased, the coverage devoted to honor killings, prosecutions of writers, and other human rights violations often overshadows the fact that much progress has been made."

¶4. (C) The Diyanet considers its efforts at international outreach important to help combat negative views of Islam, according to Gormez. In addition to its jurisdiction over some 50,000 mosques in Turkey, the Diyanet is responsible for staffing and overseeing the approximately 1500 Turkish speaking mosques in Europe. Gormez explained that the Diyanet trains thousands of muftis annually in one of its five training centers in Turkey, and then assigns them domestically and abroad. Current training in cross-cultural sensitivities will help combat prejudice and push forward the Diyanet's reform priorities abroad. Gormez told us that the Pope's recent controversial comments magnify the need for education and will cause the Diyanet to redouble its efforts.

In an obvious jab at the Diyanet's well-known opposition to Christian missionary activities in Turkey, Gormez emphasized that all work done abroad is performed under the request of local governments for assistance.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Diyanet continues to have an important impact on Turkey's largely Muslim society, making its reform efforts particularly noteworthy. Gormez may have overstated the impact of the reforms, but he clearly understands that government support for these types of cultural changes soften suspicions among ultra-secularists and religious minorities regarding the Diyanet's basically Sunni Muslim agenda. End comment.

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